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SUBJECT: TFGG01 Russian media on ceasefire and U.S. interference in Georgia

Ref: a) Moscow 2343, b) Moscow 2366

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Russian media treated the ceasefire with Georgia as a Russian victory that sent a message of strength to Georgia and the West, but noted that the conflict was far from settled. Broadcast images of shelled homes and weeping victims underlined the human costs of the conflict. Russian press continued to hold Washington ultimately responsible for the conflict. Print, broadcast, and online media exhibited QevidenceQ of direct USG participation and support for Georgia, including a soldierQs badge from a joint U.S. - Georgian military training exercise in July. Broadcast media particularly demonized Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili, with QexpertsQ diagnosing his mental instability on the evening news. End summary.

A Sigh of Relief

¶2. (U) After MedvedevQs August 12 announcement ending hostilities, there were no calls in the media for Russian troops to push towards Tbilisi or continue fighting. Although some outlets highlighted the Russian Qvictory,Q news coverage focused on the aftermath of the fighting: the human toll, as well as the new geopolitical consequences. Business daily Vedomosti observed: QThe war between Georgia and Russia marks the beginning of a totally new period in the former Soviet territories that will impact global politics....A Moscow that is ready to use force outside of its borders is a new phenomenon that its neighbors and leading world powers will have to deal with.Q Pro-Kremlin Izvestiya echoed a traditional Russian lament, noting QWeQve entered a new geopolitical era and it has become clear that Russia does not have reliable allies.Q Pictures of wounded soldiers, wailing mothers and elderly refugees covered the pages of the tabloid newspapers and evening news broadcasts, along with quotes from Putin and others using the word Qgenocide.

Russian media sees U.S. behind Georgian actions

¶3. (SBU) Russian television continued to trumpet QevidenceQ of U.S. planning and support for Georgian military action in South Ossetia. On state-owned Rossiya, a correspondent showed a badge he said had been taken from the body of a killed Georgian soldier. The badge displayed the U.S. and Georgian flags under the headline QImmediate Response 08Q and said on its reverse side: QProperty of USA SETAF. (Note: Immediate Response 08 was a regional joint training exercise held in July.)

¶4. (U) Print and broadcast media carried statements by Russian Ambassador to NATO Rogozin accusing the United States of providing military assistance. News channels showed Rogozin blasting NATO for not holding an emergency NATO- Russia council meeting, noting "Procedural rules didn't preclude NATO Ambassadors from meeting with the Georgian Foreign Minister....I wanted to ask our American colleagues, about the degree of US involvement in the preparations for this bloodshed. We continue to insist that our partners do not

dodge a serious adult political dialogue on this topic."

15. (SBU) Russian media questioned the motives behind Washington's involvement in the South Ossetian conflict. On the state-owned Channel One, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin felt a Cold War mentality on the part of U.S. diplomats was responsible. Izvestiya ran an op-ed by Sergei Markov, Director of the Political Research Institute, who accused VPOTUS Cheney and neo-cons of starting the war to ensure the election of Sen. John McCain. Russian Ambassador to the UN Vitaliy Churkin was quoted on August 11 by the state wire service ITAR-TASS as hypothesizing that perhaps Saakashvili misinterpreted signals that could have been sent from Washington.

Saakashvili = Karadzic/Milosevic?

16. (SBU) While holding the U.S. responsible on the one hand, Russian media continued to blast Saakashvili as a war criminal and madman of the highest order. Rossiya channel's premier news program Vesti had an expert from the Serbsky forensic psychiatry institute (infamous for its role in committing dissidents to psychiatric wards in the 1970s) examine tapes of Saakashvili for evidence of mental problems. The expert held that Saakashvili could be mistaken for Hitler. (A metaphor echoed in an op-ed by Izvestiya as well.) Also, Vesti interviewed an alleged expert from the University of Maryland who said that Saakashvili's eyes had the inclination for whims and wishes that have to be satisfied at any cost. On August 12, the Vesti website ran an interview with a Polish member of Parliament who said that "This man [Saakashvili] in the future..., will possibly be compared in the West with Karadzic and Milosevic."

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